

St. Margaret Mary's losing pastor

BY CONNIE NOGAS

Staff Writer

APALACHIN — Rev. David Simon, pastor of St. Margaret Mary's Church in Apalachin, isn't the kind of priest you see only at the altar on Sunday mornings.

Not feeling well? Simon will visit you and bring you some French bread he and volunteers bake themselves.

"If there's a parish dinner, I'm there cooking," he said.

This is the last full week of service for the hands-on priest, who has spent exactly half of his 32-year career at St. Margaret Mary's Church. Rev. Robert Ring will succeed him as Simon heads to his new assignment at St. Paul's Church in Webster, near Rochester.

Simon, who was ordained by Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen, is excited about his new parish — and sad about leaving his parishioners. "They're really my family after 16 years," he said. "When one of them is sick, I hurt with them."

"We'll miss him dearly," said Tina Fantigrossi, a member of the church.

During his tenure, Simon started the Stephen Ministry, where volunteers help those suffering through a loss. He also presided over a \$700,000 church renovation project that should be paid off within three years.

He's seen some sad trends too, like the many parishioners forced to leave the area to seek jobs elsewhere.

Simon is most proud of the many lay ministries in his parish who help cope with a priest shortage.

"Lay people must be empowered to do the mission of the church," he said. "There is no ministry in the



KAREN VIBERT-KENNEDY staff photographer

After 32 years, Rev. David Simon is leaving his Apalachin parish for one in Rochester.

parish that is not men and women standing side by side."

Ever the hands-on priest, Simon walked more than 6 miles every year for the annual walk for hunger in Tioga County. Most of the time, he raised the most money, but credits his parishioners for sponsoring him. "The parish is very concerned with the poor," he said.

Parishioners say they'll miss his friendly golden retriever, Brandon. They'll also feel the loss at Christmas, remembering his 12-foot Christmas tree with 5000 lights and 1,500 ornaments.

They'll miss his homilies, too. Wearing a cordless microphone, the priest walks around the church, Oprah Winfrey-style, preaching. "He's not just standing up at the

FAREWELL RECEPTION

Come and listen to the Rev. David Simon as he celebrates his final Mass as pastor of St. Margaret Mary Church of Apalachin at 10 a.m. Sunday. Say good-bye to him at a reception from 2 to 5 p.m. Sunday at the church hall.

pulpit reading from a text that was written," said Chris Basile, a parishioner and former finance administrator for the parish.

Rev. Simon had a gentle but firm way to let people know when he was displeased with them — such as coming late or leaving Mass early, Fantigrossi said.

"He compares it to a meal. Why would you walk into a meal late? Why would you leave a meal early?"